

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 13 November 2017.

PRESENT: Mr A R Hills (Chairman), Mr A H T Bowles, Mr I S Chittenden, Mrs S Prendergast (Substitute for Mrs C Bell), Mr H Rayner (Substitute for Mr K Pugh), Cllr Ms R Doyle (Canterbury CC), Mr J Scholey (Sevenoaks DC), Mr L Laws, Mr G Lewin (Swale BC), Mr H Rogers (Tonbridge and Malling BC), Ms G Brown (KALC), Mr D Henshaw (KALC), Mr P Flaherty and Mr M Dobson (Upper Medway IDB)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M D Payne

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Tant (Flood Risk Manager), Mr T Harwood (Principal Resilience Officer) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

15. Mr Ken Gregory
(Item)

The Committee observed a moment's silence in memory of Mr Ken Gregory who had passed away since the previous meeting.

16. Minutes of the meeting on 17 July 2017
(Item 3)

(1) Mr Scholey informed the Committee in respect of Minute 11 (8) that Southern Water had agreed to accept responsibility for the SuDS Scheme referred to.

(2) RESOLVED that subject to an amendment to Minute 11 (7) setting out that the Gold Commander was the Chair of the SCG, the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2017 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

17. Medway Estuary and Swale Shoreline Management Strategy - Presentation by John Byne, Environment Agency
(Item 4)

(1) John Byne from the Environment Agency gave a presentation. The accompanying slides are contained within the electronic agenda papers on the KCC website.

(2) Mr Byne said that the Environment Agency was working on the Medway Estuary and Swale Flood and Coastal Risk Strategy in partnership with their consultants, Mott MacDonald.

(3) Mr Byne described the area covered by the Strategy. It started at Stoke by the Kingsnorth Power Station, went down the Medway to Allington, extending as far east as Graveney Marshes (Cleve Hill). It also covered the Isle of Sheppey.

(4) Mr Byne then described the three tiers of coastal defence planning. The EA had published the Shoreline Management Plans by 2010 and was now working on the strategies which would consider the Plans in greater detail, consider whether their policies were still relevant and establish policies for smaller frontages. The strategies were considering costings for high level options rather than undertaking any scheme design.

(5) Mr Byne went on to say that Phase 3 of the Strategy (short list to preferred options) had now been signed off by the Project Board during the summer and Phase 4 had now begun. The Consultants were now completing the reports in preparation for consultation which was due to commence towards the end of winter 2018.

NB: The consultation is now live. The Link is: <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/ksles/medway-estuary-and-swale-strategy/>

(6) Mr Byne turned to the development of the preferred options. It had taken two years to develop the criteria which would enable the Project to consider the best way to manage the various frontages through the coastal area. The main priority was to reduce the risk and the threat of coastal flooding and coastal erosion to people and their property. The second criterion was to deliver the greatest environmental, social and economic benefit. There were a large number of designated areas in the Medway/Swale area which needed to be preserved and protected, including their natural habitats. The EA had worked closely with Natural England on their *Coastal Footpath* project. The third criterion of working with natural processes aimed to ensure that work on coastal flood protection dovetailed with the protection of natural habitats. The “adapting to future risks” criterion took account of the Strategy’s hundred year duration. Adaption to phenomena such Climate Change and other factors was therefore crucial.

(7) The process of identifying options had taken the form of identifying a longlist of options through workshops and other forms of consultation, screening them down in order to create a shortlist of realistic and sensible options for evaluation in greater detail. These had been evaluated through a number of investigations and reports which paid particular regard to environmental and social aspects as well as costs and benefits. This process had led to the selection of preferred options.

(8) Mr Byne then showed the Committee how the area covered by the Strategy had itself been broken down into 11 Benefit Areas. The needs of each of these had been considered in great detail.

(9) The preferred options took three forms for consideration in each of the Benefit Areas. The first was to “hold the line” by maintain or improving the existing defences. The second option was “no active intervention” which consisted of ceasing to maintain defences, allowing them to return to their natural state. This was suggested in some of the more rural areas, although this approach would not prevent landowners from establishing their own defences. The third option was “managed realignment” involving establishing defences inland from where they currently stood. There were 6 “managed realignments” across the Strategy area. These could be set at natural high ground (reducing maintenance liability). This would also enable the creation of new habitat areas where to compensate for those that would be lost due to climate change during the 100 year period, particularly in respect of the salt marshes.

(10) Mr Byne next set out the project tasks that were currently being undertaken. Several Stakeholder Groups had been set up over the previous two or three years, involving the Parish Councils as well as the other Local Authorities, landowners and businesses. These Groups had supported the development of the preferred options. A Stakeholder Group meeting had also been held in September on the identified preferred options. Following that meeting all the affected landowners (some 180 in total) had been written to in order to invite them to attend drop-in meetings in October to discuss the Strategy. The Team had also needed to carry out a great deal of statutory environmental reporting. The Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment had both been completed and been published for consultation. The public consultation had gone live on 6 November 2017, consisting of on- line questionnaires and three public drop-in events at Eastchurch, Gillingham and Halling. Meanwhile, the necessary draft appraisal work was being undertaken, including the draft Implementation Plan.

(11) Mr Byne concluded his presentation by showing the Committee a map (Slide 12) which broke down the Strategy area into coloured segments and identified the preferred option for each of their frontages.

(12) Mr Byne replied to a question from Mrs Doyle by confirming that high level costings had been calculated for each of the proposed schemes. These would be applied over time as individual schemes were introduced.

(13) Mr Bowles said that Swale BC had just received an application for Europe’s largest solar park (890 acres) at Nagden and Cleve Marshes. He asked how much consultation there had been between the developers and the Project Team and whether the current designation for the area between Faversham Creek and Seasalter was likely to be its final one.

(14) Mr Byne confirmed that discussions had been held with the developers of the solar park. These had taken place during a landowner’s meeting a year

earlier. More detailed discussions had taken place during the summer with the aim of co-ordinating timescales. Consideration had also been given to costings. The site was intended to have a 40 year life. For the first 25 years the area would be maintained as it was. He was reasonably confident that the developers and the Strategy would work successfully together. It would be theoretically for the Environment Agency to leave responsibility for the flood defences entirely to the developers, although it was unlikely that this would happen. The most likely approach would be based on partnership funding with the developers acting as major contributors. The Strategy was based on current Government funding rules. The partnership funding rules that was being applied to all schemes would also apply in relation to this project using the benefit cost ratios and funding scores that applied to all of the frontages.

(15) Mr Payne asked whether Mr Byne could confirm that there were no plans to “advance the line” in the area covered by the Strategy. Mr Byne confirmed that this was the case.

(16) Mr Tant agreed to pass on the address of the consultation website to Members of the Committee. The costings that accompanied the proposal were for the most part more beneficial than expensive. He added that the Government’s contribution to the cost of the implementation of the scheme would be low in most areas. He asked what strategy was being used to secure partnership funding. Mr Byne replied that the Project Team had amassed considerable data on existing beneficiaries who would be identified in the Implementation Plan. The primary driver in the development of the Strategy had been flood risk management considerations as opposed to costings. Nevertheless, high level costs had needed to be included.

(17) Mr Byne explained that “high level cost” meant the generic overall figure that the work was expected to cost in total based on unit costs. This figure had been used to inform the Project Team whether the benefits would justify the cost. This figure would not include detailed considerations such as design or the materials to be used. There would be no levy on landowners, but the Government would only pay for the benefits it identified through its funding formula. The rest of the cost would need to be borne by the local beneficiaries, who would be consulted at a later stage once the details had been fully worked out.

(18) The Chairman asked how the flood defence requirements were updated to take account of the most recent climate change projections and data. He also asked whether there were any implications for wildlife identified by Natural England arising out of the requirement to secure partnership funding from landowners.

(19) Mr Byne replied that the Strategy would be reviewed approximately every ten years, taking account of climate change developments. The Strategy itself had also been prepared in the light of the most recent data gathered in the Thames Estuary area over the previous 10 to 15 years, including the effect of the differences between that data and previous forecasts. He then confirmed that discussions had been held with landowners in areas such as the Medway

Marshes who were more than happy to undertake their own maintenance. Natural England had been involved as part of the Project Team, and they would still need to be consulted if people were undertaking works in designated areas to ensure that the work proposed was not harmful to wildlife. There would also be other controls such as the need to obtain a Flood Risk Activity Permit.

(20) Mr Laws asked what approach would be adopted in respect of individual landowners who could disrupt an entire flood defence scheme by refusing to participate. Mr Byne agreed that this was definite risk. The NFU was participating actively in the Stakeholder meetings and had also assisted with liaison with individual landowners. He referred to landowner partnerships in East Anglia which had been facilitated by the NFU with input from the EA. This approach was a model which could be applied in the Medway Estuary and Swale.

(21) Mr Harwood said that local multi-agency flood planning acknowledged the inter-relationship between fluvial flooding and tidal flood risk, as well as local or surface water impacts. This was particularly important in some of the project areas such as the Isle of Sheppey where tide-locking could be an issue. KCC's professional officers would be looking very closely at the Environment Agency's proposals and plans to see whether there was an opportunity to achieve holistic benefits both for areas subject to tidal flood risk and adjacent inland areas.

(22) RESOLVED that Mr Byne be thanked for his presentation and that its content be noted for assurance.

18. Recent Kent Resilience Forum activities - Presentation by Stephen Scully (Senior Resilience Officer at Kent Resilience Team)
(Item 5)

(1) Stephen Scully (KRF Senior Resilience Officer) asked the Committee to note that Flooding had not been the top priority for the multi-agency emergency planning community since the previous meeting of the Committee. There had necessarily been a strong concentration on security matters as well as the Grenfell Tower fire response which had involved a great deal of mutual aid support from emergency planners in Kent.

(2) Flooding had, however, still been the focus of much local action. Work during the summer had included a flood risk assessment review on all of the county's multi-agency flood plans, which had resulted in them being updated. KRF had also re-invigorated its humanitarian response, which was a crucial part of its work on flood response. Work on winter preparedness was also on-going. Press Officers continued to refine protocols for warning and informing and a winter preparedness workshop had also been held for resilience partners. Advice to businesses was continuing, led by KCC and supported by all the Borough and District Councils. Further work was taking place on long term risk assessments in relation to climate change.

(3) Mr Scully then set out the key activities, which included the attendance by the Duty Emergency Planning Officer at the winter preparedness workshop. The workshop had focused on a number of incident scenarios, enabling partners to learn from one another and share good practice.

(4) The Flood Warden workshop had demonstrated the tremendous effort that had taken place since the storms of winter 2013/14. There were now some 200 flood wardens in Kent. They had asked for a workshop rather than a seminar to facilitate more activity-based training. The feedback from this event had been overwhelmingly positive.

(5) Mr Scully then said that Met Office training for resilience partners had been delivered at the Kent Police Training School. It had been mainly aimed at statutory organisations but had also been made available to the voluntary sector. This had been very successful and it was planned to hold another one-day session in 2018.

(6) The East Coast Flood Group had studied the outcome of *Exercise Surge*, producing some very strong forward-thinking recommendations. The next meeting would involve Mr Scully doing a joint presentation with Lincolnshire CC on caravan parks in flood risk areas along the coast.

(7) Mr Scully said that the KRF Seminar had concentrated on security, but had nevertheless featured a KRF stand addressing training and exercising, winter preparedness, and the *Kent Prepared* website. All the latest information could be found on this website under the "Flood Wardens" heading.

(8) It had been intended that a Recovery exercise would take place earlier in the year. It had been re-scheduled for 27 November due to the need to respond to the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Some of the lessons from *Exercise Surge* in terms of the consequences of a mass full-scale evacuation recovery operation were still being translated into practice and this process was ongoing.

(9) Mr Scully concluded his presentation by referring to two events. These were the surface water flooding in Tunbridge Wells, which had demonstrated the difficulty of predicting and dealing with events of this nature, and the East Coast flood on 4-5 October, where the response co-ordination had been very impressive. He said that Kent had never worked better in partnership. This had included very early notification from the EA on the Monday morning of the event being likely to happen at the weekend. Everything had been in readiness for flood response work, although the trigger point had not quite been reached.

(10) The Committee agreed to a suggestion from Mr Flaherty that a motion of thanks be given to Stephen Scully for the passion and energy that he had brought to the successful recruitment of Flood Wardens in Kent.

(11) In heartily agreeing with Mr Flaherty's suggestion, the Chairman said that there was still a need to recruit more Flood Wardens in parts of the County, and that one untapped source might be young people in schools, Cadet Forces or the Scouts.

(12) Mr Scully thanked the Committee and replied to the Chairman's point by saying that the recruitment strategy had thus far focussed on county-wide large-scale sessions. This year, there would be 10 sessions in specific catchment areas. Although many of the flood wardens were not as young as they had formerly been, they were all highly committed and available. He agreed that school cadets and scouts and others should be brought in, not necessarily as individual Flood Wardens but as groups as part of the wider emergency planning community within the parishes. This meant that they would be able to contribute in any emergency (for example as Snow Wardens).

(13) Mrs Brown said that there were 35 Flood Wardens and Co-ordinators in Yalding. It was, however, the Scout Group which undertook vital tasks such as relaying messages or bringing refreshments to the wardens. She underlined the importance of communication, not just during a flooding event, but at all times. It was especially important to keep in touch with the Flood Wardens during quiet periods by, for example, organising social gatherings.

(14) Mr Harwood said that the KRF's Pan-Kent Flood Group had identified that there was some patchiness in provision of Flood Wardens across the county, with urban areas particularly deficient. A Task and Finishg Group had been established to specifically examine this question. Specific approaches were being developed in those parts of Kent where there was under-provision. An example of this was that a training event was scheduled to take place in New Romney on 30 November.

(15) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Mr Stephen Scully be thanked for his presentation; and
- (b) the Committee's appreciation and gratitude be recorded for the passion and energy that Mr Scully has brought to the successful recruitment of Flood Wardens in Kent.

19. Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC Flood Response activity since the last meeting

(Item 6)

(1) Mr Harwood informed the Committee that there had been 5 additional flood alerts issued by the EA since the publication of the agenda papers. The figures in paragraph 2.5 of the report should therefore read: "21 flood alerts (2 fluvial and 19 coastal." There had also been an additional 6th occasion when the Thames Barrier had been closed (paragraph 2.7).

(2) Mr Harwood then said that the key issue was that there had been very little rain since the last meeting of the Committee. There had been a very dry winter in autumn and winter of 2015/16. The last 12 months had seen less than half the long term average rainfall total.

(3) The key period of activity had been around the autumn equinox where there had been high spring tides and storm activity. There had been concerns over potential surge situations, but these had not materialised in any significant way except for some minor coastal flooding in the Faversham Creek area and parts of the coastal Isle of Sheppey.

(4) Mr Lewin asked what the tests and operational reasons had been for the 6 closures of the Thames Barrier. Mr Harwood replied that these had mainly been operational, occurring during the 4-6 October period and on the 21st in response to the EA Flood Alerts issued at those times. In consequence, there had not actually been any need for testing.

(5) Mr Lewin then asked what consideration the EA had given to the downstream effect of the closure of the Thames Barrier and its effect on the Shoreline Management Plan, and whether there was any correlation that needed to be taken into account.

(6) Mr Byne replied that there was no substantial correlation to be concerned with as the closures did not affect the water levels they the EA was concerned with in the Medway and Swale Estuary area. There had been a bounce-back effect which had caused minor flooding but this did not extend as far east as the area covered by the Strategy. The area affected was the the Thames Estuary, which was considered as part of the Thames Estuary 2100 Plan.

(7) Mrs Prendergast referred to paragraph 2.3 and asked what conditions were imposed in respect of the smaller reservoirs before water companies were permitted to abstract and fill from ordinary watercourses.

(8) Mr Tant replied that every reservoir abstraction licence had conditions that were mostly applied in the same way.

(9) Mrs Prendergast then said that she represented a constituency where there were a number of small agricultural reservoirs. In one of them, the farmer was able to control the flow in and out of the local stream, which had led to complaints from farmers on lower ground that they had no access to water. She asked what controls were in place and how they were monitored.

(10) Mr Tant said that It was the EA which regulated reservoirs. The questions raised by Mrs Prendergast would be addressed at the next meeting of the Committee.

(11) RESOLVED that the current water resources situation be noted together with the level of alerts and warnings received since the last meeting of the Committee.

20. Dates of meetings in 2018

(Item 7)

The Committee agreed the following dates for meetings in 2018:-

Monday, 5 March 2018
Monday, 16 July 2018
Monday, 12 November 2018.